

Message Text

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E.I. 11652: NA

TAGS: SOCI, ELAB, CM

SUBJECT: GURC DECREES WAGE INCREASE AS WAVE OF STRIKES BREAKS OUT

1. SUMMARY. FOLLOWING A SPATE OF WILDCAT STRIKES AT ABOUT A DOZEN INDUSTRIAL INSTALLATIONS IN DOUALA BEGINNING JANUARY 21, GURC -- ANXIOUS TO AVOID TRIGGERING MORE INFLATION -- ON JANUARY 29 DECREED MODEST WAGE INCREASES FOR BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS. INCREASES WERE GRADUATED, AND GREATER IN PERCENTAGE TERMS FOR THOSE AT LOWER END OF WAGE SCALES. INCREASES VARIED FROM 5-18 PERCENT, PROBABLY AVERAGING ABOUT 10 PERCENT. THIS IS WELL UNDER THE 20-25 PERCENT INCREASE IN COST OF LIVING SINCE LAST GENERAL WAGE INCREASE DECREED IN JULY 1974. SOME OF THE RECENT STRIKES WERE SETTLED FOR IMPROVED FRINGE BENEFITS, OTHERS ARE STILL CONTINUING AS OF FEBRUARY 2. IN ADDITION, ABOUT 3,000 DOUALA DOCK WORKERS WALKED OUT ON FEBRUARY 2 WITH DEMANDS FOR NEW FRINGE BENEFITS THAT WOULD PRODUCE EQUIVALENT OF SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED EARNINGS. WITH WORKERS NOT HAPPY ABOUT RELATIVELY MODEST WAGE INCREASE, MORE STRIKES MAY BE IN THE MAKING. END SUMMARY

2. GURC ANNOUNCED ON JAN 30 SEVERAL DECREES SIGNED JAN 29 TO RAISE SALARIES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES RETROACTIVE TO JAN 1. REGULAR CIVIL SERVANTS (AND MILITARY) RECEIVED GENERAL 8 PERCENT INCREASE, PLUS
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SMALL ADDITIONAL ALLOWANCE RANGING FROM EQUIVALENT OF

US\$2 - 9 MONTHLY (WITH EMPLOYEES AT LOWER END OF PAY SCALE RECEIVING THE HIGHER AMOUNTS). PUBLIC SECTOR CONTRACTUAL EMPLOYEES RECEIVED 8, 10, OR 12 PERCENT INCREASE (LOWER-LEVEL TYPES RECEIVING THE HIGHER PERCENTAGE INCREASES). PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES IN ZONE 1 (YAOUNDE, DOUALA AND BUEA) RECEIVED SALARY INCREASES OF 5, 8, 12, OR 15 PERCENT AND THOSE ELSEWHERE IN COUNTRY 5, 10, 15, OR 18 PERCENT DEPENDING ON LEVEL; ALSO FAMILY ALLOWANCES RAISED FROM CFA 500 PER CHILD PER MONTH TO CFA 700.

3. DURING WEEK PRECEDING THESE INCREASES, SERIES OF WILDCAT STRIKES HAD BROKEN OUT IN DOUALA, BEGINNING WITH JAN 21 STRIKE AT CIACAM COTTON TEXTILE PLANT. MOVEMENT SPREAD TO ABOUT DOZEN COMPANIES, WITH TOTAL OF PERHAPS 4,000 EMPLOYEES. DEMANDS WERE ESSENTIALLY FOR BETTER FRINGE BENEFITS (SINCE EMPLOYERS LACK AUTHORITY SIMPLY RAISE WAGES). SOME WALKOUTS WERE SETTLED BY AGREEMENT IMPROVE VARIOUS BENEFITS.

4. AS OF FEB 2, FOUR OF THOSE COMPANIES (LARGEST IS BATA SHOE FACTORY) REPORTEDLY STILL ON STRIKE, WITH TOTAL OF 1-2,000 EMPLOYEES. OTHERS BACK AT WORK. BUT IN ADDITION, DOUALA DOCKWORKERS WENT ON STRIKE FEB 2. PORT ACTIVITIES AT STANDSTILL, WITH ABOUT 3,000 DOCKERS STRIKING. THEY REPORTEDLY DISSATISFIED WITH EXTENT OF WAGE INCREASE, BUT ASKING FOR KINDS OF IMPROVEMENTS WHICH EMPLOYERS COULD GRANT -- HOUSING ALLOWANCE, FREE MEDICAL CARE FOR SELVES AND FAMILIES, RAISING CATEGORY OF WORKER CLASSIFICATION (WHICH WOULD MEAN HIGHER WAGES).

5. ACCORDING AMCONSUL DOUALA'S EMPLOYER SOURCES, SYNDUSTRICAM (ASSN OF TOP 70 INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES) HAS BEEN UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM WORKERS, SUGGESTED WAGE INCREASES TO GURC BOTH IN MAY AND OCTOBER 1975. SUGGESTIONS REJECTED BY GURC ON BASIS THAT GOVT COULD NOT EFFECTIVELY CONTROL MARKET PRICES, AND PRICES WOULD RISE SHARPLY AFTER GENERAL WAGE INCREASE, AS THEY HAD AFTER INCREASES OF SEPT 1973 AND JULY 1974.

6. SAME SOURCES CLAIM TRACTS AND NEWLY EMERGENT NEWSPAPER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAMEROON NOUVEA -- ALLEGEDLY PUT OUT BY LONG-BANNED COMMUNIST-SUPPORTED UPC OPPOSITION PARTY -- CIRCULATING IN DOUALA SETTING FORTH SCHEDULE CALLING FOR STRIKES TO START PROGRESSIVELY FEB 2 AT PORT, FEB 3 AT SONEL (ELECTRIC COMPANY), AND FEB 4 AT REGIFERCAM (RR). THESE SOURCES SEE UPC BEHIND STRIKES AS PLANNED DISRUPTIVE MANEUVER. THEY JUDGE THAT GURC PANICKED, GAVE IN TO STRIKE PRESSURE, AND HAS THEREBY EMBOLDENED THE RADICAL LEADERS.

7. NOT A WORD ABOUT ANY OF STRIKES HAS APPEARED IN CAMEROONIAN MEDIA.

8. COMMENT: IT IS TRUE THAT LOCAL PRICES HOT UP IMMEDIATELY AFTER SEPTEMBER 1973 AND JULY 1974 WAGE INCREASES. THIS WILL LIKELY HAPPEN AGAIN DESPITE GURC'S PLEAS AND EFFORTS TO HOLD THE LINE. COST OF LIVING FOR AVERAGE AFRICAN FAMILY IN YAOUNDE AND DOUALA HAS RISEN 20-25 PERCENT SINCE JULY 1974. GURC WITHSTOOD PRESSURES AS LONG AS POSSIBLE FOR WAGE INCREASE IN EFFORT TO AVOID FEEDING INFLATIONARY SPIRAL. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT ORDINARY CAMEROONIANS HAVE BEEN SUFFERING -- AND GRUMBLING. INCREASE GRANTED -- OBVIOUSLY LONG UNDER STUDY AND PERHAPS RPT PERHAPS SPEEDED UP BY OUTBREAK OF STRIKES -- HAS BEEN KEPT AS MODERATE AS GURC JUDGED POSSIBLE, AND DOES NOT KEEP WORKERS EVEN WITH INFLATION OF PAST 18 MONTHS. IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT SALARIED WORKERS WILL NOT BE ECSTATIC WITH EXTENT OF THE INCREASE. IMMEDIATE FUTURE MAY BE INTERESTING AND TRYING PERIOD.
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